

STONY BROKE IN NO MAN'S LAND (Finborough Theatre, January 24)

By **Mark Taha** - Feb 1, 2016



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This is a play with a cast of two, but David Brett and Gareth Williams play 21 roles between them – 6 and 15 respectively – in the new John Burrows show. This is a reunion in that they were both members of 1980s group The Flying Pickets, which Burrows brought together.

Stony Broke...is the story of 1916 conscript Percy Cotton (Brett), who is called up, sees his girlfriend Nellie (Williams – balding, middle aged and male), and goes off to war over her protests. His commanding officer gets killed, he gets a Blighty one (a war wound that gets a soldier invalided back to England), and finds out that Nellie's now a spirit medium – for money (surprise). He proposes, but for some reason, she prefers to be powerful Sir Gregory's mistress as well as well-paid. One source of information is Percy's late CO's papers, he gave them to her to give to his parents but somehow she forgot.

Percy's in Russia when the war ends, being looked after by a count, then he and a bloke who was ironically called up on Armistice Day are back in France cleaning up the

battlefields. Worry about Bolshevism and Sir Gregory's being caught up in a riot leads to Nellie having the idea of bringing one symbolic body home, the unknown warrior. Her reward for this is, instead of marrying Sir Gregory and meeting Lloyd George, is to be dumped after losing her clients due to being exposed by Percy's ex-CO's mother. To be fair, she leaves with a £100 payoff and the realisation that "I was right!", she could be contacted by the dead.

It's a good comedy-drama, though with only a few songs rather than being a full-blooded musical, and wouldn't Percy have been demobbed by late 1920?

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